

## INTRODUCTION

Wisconsin's plan was designed with the purposes of TANF block grant, described under Section 401 of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), as its foundation. Wisconsin's TANF program seeks to provide the necessary training, supportive services and financial incentives for low-income parents to obtain permanent and stable employment with access to further training that will lead to career advancement.

In September 1997, the Wisconsin Works (W-2) program was implemented statewide. W-2's success lies in its philosophy that most individuals can become valuable members of the workforce, and all are capable of making some contribution through work. Under W-2, parents are afforded the opportunity to provide for their own family and enjoy the pride inherent in self-reliance. This is accomplished through the provision of short-term education and training coupled with work training activities that are transferable to regular unsubsidized employment.

While W-2 remains the core of Wisconsin's TANF program, new challenges and opportunities have provided the impetus for other innovative undertakings:

The flexibility afforded states under the TANF block grant combined with a significantly reduced cash assistance caseload has enabled Wisconsin to invest in initiatives that more broadly focus on the employment needs of low-income families. Participants who begin employment may receive child care and transportation assistance, job survival/retention techniques, and guidance in making career decisions. Initiatives that came about after implementation of W-2, such as Workforce Attachment and Advancement and the Employment Transportation Program, ensure that low-income working parents have access to a wide range of work supports to address their employment needs as well as training opportunities to advance in the workplace.

In the process of reexamining how Wisconsin's employment system could more effectively serve low-income parents, the Department also recognized the need to make internal changes. The resulting integration of the former Divisions of Economic Support and Workforce Excellence into one Division of Workforce Solutions, has enabled the Department to look at all of its programs as a spectrum of services with the goal of promoting upward mobility and lifelong learning for all of Wisconsin's workforce.

As W-2 agencies continue to transition participants into unsubsidized employment, the remaining caseload is comprised mainly of individuals with more severe barriers to employment. Those individuals who would have been exempt from participating under the old welfare system must now engage in activities that will prepare them for employment. As a result, greater emphasis is being placed on identifying the most effective strategies for helping the harder-to-serve population enter the workforce. For example, the Department is developing a more comprehensive screening and assessment process to ensure that participants' barriers are identified upfront and appropriate services and accommodations are provided to address those barriers.

Finally, there are initiatives within Wisconsin's TANF program that seek to promote personal responsibility and career development among other family members. Programs such as Brighter Futures engage teenagers in constructive activities that put them on track for personal self-sufficiency as they reach adulthood. Comparatively, non-custodial parents are offered work training and supportive services through the Children First and Workforce Attachment and

Advancement programs, empowering them to meet their children's as well as their own financial needs.

## **GENERAL PROVISION ASSURANCES**

Under the TANF plan, with the exception of Safety Services and Child Welfare Prevention Services, Wisconsin will provide services to needy families at or under 250 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) with the level of services provided varying according to income and assets as outlined in the plan. For those two programs that fall under the fourth purpose of the TANF program (i.e., Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families), there are no income limits in place.

### **The State ensures the following:**

1. Wisconsin's TANF program is designed to serve all political subdivisions in the State (not necessarily in a uniform manner), provide assistance to needy families with (or expecting) children, and provide parents with job preparation, work and support services to enable them to leave the program and become self-sufficient.
2. The program will require a parent or caretaker receiving assistance to engage in work (as defined by the State) once the State determines that the parent or caretaker is able to engage in work, or once the parent or caretaker has received assistance under the program for 24 months (whether or not consecutive), whichever is earlier.
3. Parents and caretakers receiving assistance under the program shall be engaged in work activities in accordance with section 407.
4. Reasonable steps shall be taken to restrict the use and disclosure of information about individuals and families receiving assistance under the program attributable to funds provided by the federal government. Chapter 49 of Wisconsin State Statutes details the restrictions on disclosure of information for Wisconsin's TANF programs.
5. Goals shall be established and action taken to prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies, with special emphasis on teenage pregnancies, and numerical goals shall be established for reducing the illegitimacy ratio of the State.
  - Wisconsin provides funding for projects to address adolescent pregnancy prevention, adolescent parent self-sufficiency, pregnancy counseling and adolescent parenting skills. Based on knowledge gained from currently funded programs and initiatives, the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS) in coordination with the Department of Workforce Development (DWD) developed the *Wisconsin Plan to Prevent Adolescent Pregnancy*, a comprehensive state plan to reduce out-of-wedlock pregnancies. This plan focuses on three equally important key elements for all of Wisconsin's children and adolescents: health, nurturing and education.
  - The Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Committee is co-chaired by division administrators within DWD and DHFS and is made up of public and private sector members from around the state (including provider agencies, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, the legal system, United Way, the State Medical Society, public health agencies, the faith community, private businesses, local government, the media, and teens and parents). This committee developed the plan and is a partner in its implementation. A series of community meetings were held around the state to gain

citizen input on the development of the plan. DHFS completed the plan in January 1998. Sub-committees continue to meet on a quarterly basis to ensure progress is being made in reaching the goals outlined in the plan.

- This plan established goals and actions to prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies, with special emphasis on adolescent pregnancies. Through the implementation of this plan, by the year 2001, Wisconsin expects to achieve a 15 percent decline from the 1995 pregnancy rate for females age 19 and under. Wisconsin will know by Spring 2003 whether this goal was achieved. The standard upon which this plan is based is one of abstinence. Special areas of concern are subsequent pregnancies, child abuse and neglect, and sexual abuse/statutory rape.
  - Although minor parents living outside of an adult supervised living arrangement are not eligible to receive cash assistance under Wisconsin Works (W-2), the W-2 agencies have been directed by the DWD to put special emphasis on providing case management services to minor parents, regardless of their income, assets, or living arrangement. All minor parents are eligible to meet with a Financial and Employment Planner (FEP) and receive W-2 case management services. Case management may include discussions on family planning, money and time-management, career planning, and parenting and independent living skills. The FEP may also provide a minor parent with information regarding available child care services, high school and school-to-work preparation, community resources, and eligibility for food stamps, other food and nutrition programs and Medicaid. Eligibility determination for these other programs will be completed according to individual program eligibility rules.
  - W-2, through its policies, encourages both parents to delay having additional children until the family is more financially secure. There are several ways the W-2 program encourages the prevention and reduction of the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies for the adult population served by W-2: 1) Flat grants: Like employment, W-2 provides cash payments based on participation, not family size. If an individual fails to participate, his or her payment is reduced by \$5.15 per hour. 2) Family cap: W-2 does treat parents who have additional children while on assistance differently. Parents caring for a child under 12 weeks old may be eligible to receive, as a "short term, non-recurrent benefit," a stipend to cover their living expenses that does not carry a work requirement. However, parents receiving such payments are exempt from time limits only if the child is born less than ten months after the individual was first determined eligible for W-2 (or if the birth was the result of sexual assault or incest). 3) Case management: FEPs may counsel participants to delay subsequent births or provide referrals to family planning services.
  - As part of the Case Management Training Series, Wisconsin is providing a participant guide on Employment-Focused Family Planning. The base of information developed will continue to be utilized in W-2 to assist participants in making choices about their career and family, encourage the use of resources available to them and make appropriate referrals based on their needs. Each W-2 agency will maintain a list of family planning referral agencies and health care providers.
6. A number of state and local initiatives are under way in Wisconsin to address the problem of statutory rape so that teenage pregnancy prevention programs are expanded in scope to include men. Examples of these efforts include:

- Training and inservices to educators through the Department of Public Instruction on the topic of reporting requirements for sexually active adolescents.
- The Wisconsin DHFS plan to reduce adolescent pregnancies addresses the issue of male responsibility, with programs developed for adolescent males.
- A locally-developed video series called *Sexuality, Attitudes and Awareness* is used to educate individuals on the legal issues and consequences of violating child sexual assault laws. The program is used with individuals who may benefit from the information as determined by the courts, a district attorney or a probation and parole officer.
- The Wisconsin State Legislature passed a law in 2001 that requires Child Protective Services (CPS) Agencies to refer all cases of suspected or threatened child sexual abuse to law enforcement. In turn, the law enforcement agency and CPS must coordinate the planning and execution of the report. Any law enforcement agency that determines that criminal action is necessary must refer the case to the District Attorney for criminal prosecution. DHFS is working to develop collaborative protocols for these investigations.

## **PUBLIC INPUT**

Through the biennial budget process, the Legislature's Joint Finance Committee meetings and other public forums, there is ongoing public dialogue regarding the Wisconsin TANF program. The Department took a number of steps to publicize the availability of the draft Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2002-FFY 2003 TANF Plan as a means of soliciting comments from the public. Information on the draft TANF plan was presented in October 2001 at the regular monthly meeting of the W-2 Contract and Implementation Committee.

In mid-October 2001, the Department mailed out information regarding the availability of the draft plan on the Department's website and the opportunity to comment on the plan through the public hearing process, by e-mail or regular mail. Information about how to obtain a hard-copy of the draft plan was also provided. The information went to 600 groups and individuals, including W-2 agencies, Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) Area Administrators and Assistant Area Administrators, child care coordinators, child support agencies, directors of county departments of human services and social services, tribal economic support directors and the Great Lakes Intertribal Council. A number of other local provider and advocacy organizations were mailed information through an interagency workgroup called the Milwaukee W-2 Advisory Panel.

As part of this public comment process, the Department scheduled and conducted a public hearing in Madison on November 6, 2001, from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. A notice of this hearing was placed on the Department's website on October 22, 2001 and published in the Wisconsin State Journal on October 28, 2001. The public hearing notice included information on who to contact at the Department to obtain a copy of the plan, how to access the plan on the Department's website, information about providing testimony at the public hearing, and the opportunity to submit written comments. Written comments on the plan were accepted by the Department for consideration through December 10, 2001.

The Department received a number of comments on the plan via e-mail, regular mail and through the public hearing. The comments included recommendations for language changes within the state plan, for state statutory changes and for changes in how the TANF program is administered. All comments were considered and two changes were made to the plan as a result.